

LESSON PLAN

TITLE

The blog: an interactive way of improving writing skills

TOPIC

On-line written activities on Environmental issues to improve their written proficiency and communicative skills

TYPE OF SCHOOL AND STUDENTS' AGE

Istituto Tecnico Commerciale
indirizzo: Relazioni Internazionali per il Marketing (ex. ERICA).
3RD year students (16 yrs old)

LEARNING ENVIRONMENT (language lab, multimedia lab, blended learning, online learning, flipped classroom)

Students and teacher worked / interacted in the multimedia lab of our linguistic department.

LEARNING AIMS

SPECIFIC/LINGUISTIC AIMS:

- Build/broaden vocabulary about environment and most common issues related to it;
- Grammar revision: expressing cause, consequence, purpose and necessity;
- Communicative focus : expressing and supporting one's own point of view, challenging others' opinions.

GENERAL /EDUCATIONAL AIMS:

- learning to take an active part in interaction;
- stimulating positive cooperation through mutual correction of mistakes;
- becoming aware that technology resources, such as Internet and Web 2.0 tools, can have educational purposes as well;
- perceiving the use the English language as useful and fun.

TOOLS CHOSEN (Hardware & Software, Web 2.0 tools, Online Resources, etc.)

Online resources: On-line free blog creator with web 2.0 tools:

<http://www.blogspot.com>

METHODOLOGY AND TEACHING PROCEDURES

The methodology is communicative:

Previous lessons: students have been introduced to the different way of expressing cause, consequence and purpose;
 students have been given a simplified article about environmental issues to read at home containing some of the grammatical structures to revise;

LESSON during which students use the Web 2.0 tools:

-Warm-up: Brainstorming: Showing students an unrealistic symbolic picture of a hand holding a portion of natural environment inhabited by men;
 asking them questions about their personal impressions, perceptions, opinions to elicit useful vocabulary and check their knowledge on the subject;
 inviting them to make hypotheses about its possible meaning(s) or links with what they may already know/have read about the topic.

- Presentation: Showing the students the blog and inviting them to subscribe and join in;
 Introducing myself through my avatar as a person seriously concerned about environment, my blog and its rules (i.e. only English is “spoken”);
 Requesting each student to introduce him/herself
 Starting with simple inputs/questions about the article

- Practice: - Yes / No questions;
 - Wh-questions;
 - Sentence reformulation
 - individual guided interaction with the teacher

Comments: students become more and more familiar with this procedures
 and with the new challenging way of making practice “together”
 simultaneously enabling them to see each other’s replies

- Production: - free interaction of students on provoking questions asked by the teacher ;
 - students continue interaction among themselves (teacher is less involved)
 - teacher ask new question(s); suggest(s) different point(s) of view,
 challenge their opinion(s)

Note: if significant errors in grammar/syntax are not corrected by the students themselves or by their classmates, the teacher ask them to think about what/how they have written

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE ACTIVITIES

What the TEACHER does	What (individual) STUDENTS or GROUP OF STUDENTS do
<p>AT HOME</p> <p>-T. asks students to read the simplified article circling all unknown vocabulary</p> <p>-T. asks students to create a G-Mail account and to write it down on a piece of paper as well. He explains how to do it.</p> <p>IN THE MULTIMEDIA LAB</p> <p>Before the warm-up activities T. invites S. to make questions about unknown vocab.</p> <p>During the warm-up T. motivates students by asking questions like: “Do you find something unusual about this picture?” “What does this picture suggest you?”</p> <p>-T. asks students to enter their mail and accept the invitation the T. had sent them He invites them to join in the blog read the instructions he wrote and after having greeted and introduced themselves, reply by saying that they have understood everything. Examples of rules: “Please do no use other language than English is allowed, ask for help by writing to T.” “Everyone must take part to the activity and feel free to interact with whom he/she likes strictly sticking</p>	<p>AT HOME</p> <p>-S read the article circling all unknown vocabulary</p> <p>-S. perform what requested (individually)</p> <p>IN THE MULTIMEDIA LAB</p> <p>-S. asks questions orally</p> <p>-S. reply to questions (orally)</p> <p>-S. access their mail account, then the blog, (someone with an avatar)</p> <p>-S. start asking question (either written or orally) in English when they don't understand and ask the teacher to help them.</p> <p>-S. read the T's instructions, begin to write: they reply to T. and introduce themselves.</p>

<p>to the subject” “Follow one conversation at a time and wait some seconds for the reply of the addressee before writing again”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -T. writes Y/N and Wh- questions on the blog about the article. - T. comments S.’s replies. - T. invites students to observe/comment or reply to some specific classmate’s response. -T. writes open questions about the article. - T. underlines interesting contributions, invites to think about alternatives - T. draws attention to significant difficulties, or suggests alternatives by using some of the grammatical structures to revise. - T. start a broader discussion about general issues connected with the topic. - the T’s invites S to motivate, support their opinion(s). - T takes occasionally part to the discussion to stimulate it, to offer other perspectives, to make them rephrase the content. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -S. answer Y/N and Wh- questions - They see their classmate’s comments -S. answer Y/N and Wh- questions -S. interact with classmate with other personal comments, corrections, integrations, replies. -S. reply to the questions. -S interact by taking part in the activity, following the rules of turn-taking and suggesting different answers. -S check their answers with their mates, correct the mistakes -S. suggest their point of view opinions. - S interact by taking part in the discussion, challenging their classmates’ opinion(s), suggesting different point of view. -S ask questions about vocab. to the T. -S rephrase, supports, further elaborate the idea(s) of other students.
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ASSESSMENT (weak and strong points, learning added value)

This was my very first attempt to use a blog and on the whole it was a positive experience both from my point of view (Teacher) and from the students'.

Strong points:

TEACHER:

- the motivation of the class was much higher than with "traditional" classroom activities;
- most students were already familiar with the use of Web 2.0 tools ;
- the blog access is controlled and safe; the web tools are free;
- no need/waste of paperware;
- no more messy written pages; words, sentences can easily and quickly changed, copied.
- This tool is quite flexible and customizable ; the teacher can create and grade and create different kinds of activities according to her needs
- the blog can be used for homework activities as well;
- the feedback is immediate and shared;
- the T. can monitor /stimulate everyone simultaneously;
- the correction and grading of every student's performance is immediate and shared by everybody and, above all, can be performed by students themselves turning competition into cooperation (very useful for written activities).
- mistakes are perceived as part of the learning process and not stigmatized,
- more time for the teacher to focus on didactic activities than on class management

STUDENTS: (replies are given by me and by my students' feedback)

- the use of web 2.0 tools is much more motivating, it enables more engaging activities;
- they are already familiar or can easily and quickly understand how to use them ;
- sometimes they can teach the teacher new tricks/functions increasing their self-esteem;
- the blog access is simple and free, they can access it from their smart phones, tablet from home, with their friends.
- no waste of paperware, messy written pages; sentences can easily be copied.
- the feedback is immediate and shared, they can get corrected and therefore improve and learn more quickly
- they feel freer, they can express themselves in a dimension where they feel more at ease;
- it is less stressful to take part /"expose" themselves and their opinion,
- mistakes are perceived as part of the learning process and not stigmatized,

Weak points:**TEACHER**

- some initial technical problems with settings;
- not all computers were working properly or personal account generated annoying technical problems;
- internet connection not always possible or sometimes very slow;
- because of the connection speed and of the simultaneous activity of 20 students replies were long-awaited for by the class and discussion was slow and interaction made difficult;
- managing turn-taking in written discussion;

STUDENTS:

- the instructions given needed a lot of repetitions
- the low linguistic proficiency of certain students was sometimes inhibiting for them;
- shy students were overwhelmed by more “communicative” ones;
- some students prefer writing with traditional pen on paper page;
- correcting mistakes publicly slowed interaction and sometimes was badly perceived or inhibiting;
- the competitive temptation was permanently present in some students;